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PERFORMER  
(and selfie icon)  
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## THE SHORTLIST

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MIKE MADISON

## THE STAT SHEET

**9,700**

Drivers ticketed during the  
first five months of Minnesota's  
hands-free cell phone law

**\$100 million**

Dollars over budget a Duluth  
interchange project has ended up before  
construction even starts in spring

**2024**

Planned debut of the St. Paul to  
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was just cleared by the FTA

**\$10 million**

In upgrades allotted for the 2020  
State Fair, including metal detectors  
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"We'd pay you less, but legally  
can't' is a terrific look."

Reader Dave Haddy responds to "Minneapolis-St. Paul airport businesses not freaked out about \$15 minimum wage" at [citypages.com](http://citypages.com).

## GUN SANCTUARY

**NORMALLY**, the term "sanctuary city" refers to places where the government limits cooperation with feds to protect immigrants from deportation. Sherburne County's GOP lawmakers want to protect a slightly different sort of person: gun owners. They're trying to establish MN's first "Second Amendment Sanctuary," meaning they'd impede enforcement of gun control measures that pro-gun activists deem contrary to the amendment. Universal background checks? Red flag laws? Who needs 'em! "We look forward to doing our part as legislators to protect and fortify the Second Amendment at the state level," a letter signed by Rep. Shane Mekeland (R-Clear Lake) and five other lawmakers reads.

## POPULAR STORIES AT CITYPAGES.COM

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# MAZDA CULPA

Charges: Eagan mayor drove drunk, got SUV stuck in snowbank

**E**agan Mayor Mike Maguire is facing criminal charges after an arrest for driving while intoxicated earlier this month.

The Eagan Police Department responded to a report of a vehicle stuck in a snowbank around 8 p.m. on January 11, according to a criminal complaint. A Mazda SUV had gone “up over the curb” before getting stuck, and was still running when cops arrived at the scene.

Maguire was sitting in the driver’s seat. The mayor smelled like alcohol, spoke with a slur, and had “bloodshot, watery, and glassy” eyes, the complaint says. He failed a field sobriety test at the scene,

and declined to take another. He was placed under arrest and, “swaying and staggering,” was helped into a police car.

A breathalyzer registered his blood alcohol level at .19, or more than twice the legal limit of .08. Maguire faces two gross misdemeanors for driving while intoxicated. A gross misdemeanor carries a maximum penalty of one year in jail and/or a \$3,000 fine.

**His blood alcohol level registered at .19.**

Aside from a speeding ticket and a parking violation, Maguire has no criminal record in Minnesota.

His case has been outsourced to the city attorney’s office in Hastings, county seat of Dakota County, to avoid a potential conflict of interest.



GLEN STUBBE, STAR TRIBUNE

Maguire, 52, was first elected mayor of that eastern suburb in 2006, and is now serving his fourth term. In 2018, Maguire’s most recent reelection, he ran unopposed and received 98 percent of the vote.

Maguire also owns Emerald Advocacy, described on LinkedIn as “offering public affairs expertise, traditional and social media strategies and integrated lobbying and grassroots action” to clients.

—MIKE MULLEN



DRINK Cheers to low-ABV beers? p. 33 | A-LIST Girl Scout cookies and beer p. 37 | MUSIC Anyone remember 1989? p. 47

Be sure to check out our people issue next week!

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**Meet one of  
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celebrated  
contemporary  
poets:  
A black, queer  
writer and  
performer  
(and selfie icon)  
from St. Paul**

by

**MICHAEL  
KLEBER-DIGGS**

**I**t's inked on Danez Smith's inner right arm in handmade, all-caps letters, set vertically from up near their shoulder down to just above the crook of their elbow: fearless.

On their left arm—same font, same size, same placement—the word “limitless” appears. Tattoos that seem part description and part reminder. Because at just 30, Smith has already claimed a place in American poetry's upper echelon thanks to work that's fearless in its confrontations with truth and limitless in how it both embraces and upends form and tradition.

Smith and I first met in 2015—before they signed with Graywolf Press, before *Don't Call Us Dead* was published and shortlisted for the National Book Award, before they became the youngest poet ever to win England's prestigious Forward Prize. And before the publication of their widely anticipated and highly praised third collection, *Homie*—released January 21—which has already awed readers and critics alike.

“I'd like to invent or order up new adjectives to describe the startling originality and ambition of Smith's work,” Parul Sehgal wrote in a rave New York Times review, calling Smith one of the most acclaimed poets of their generation. “I'd like to unwrap some brand-new words, oddly pronged words, to convey their wary intelligence and open heart.”

Here in Minnesota, friends who know Smith well touch on similar themes. Smith is simultaneously exceptional and normal—utterly uncommon yet down to earth. “It goes without saying that they are brilliant,” says Tish Jones, founder and executive director of TruArtSpeaks, who attended Central High School with Smith and was active with them in the early days of performance-based poetry.

Jan Mandell, the highly regarded St. Paul Central High School theater-arts teacher, shares similar sentiments. “Danez tells me everything—where they hurt, who they love,” she says. “Danez is not







NOTHING BUT HEMP

## Want Natural Relief?

Most Americans can remember the last time they took a commonplace pain pill.

Ibuprofen, Advil and other non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs, are widely popular across the United States and for many they are as commonplace as coffee in the morning or a drink on the weekend.

What many don't know is that NSAIDs carry with them significant risks, according to the U.S.

Food and Drug Administration. Because of this, many have found natural CBD products can offer helpful and healthy alternatives to popular over-the-counter NSAIDs.

According to statements from the FDA, including a renewed warning in 2015, NSAID pain relievers carry a risk of heightened blood pressure and heart attacks.

Harvard Medical School reported that one NSAID was responsible for as many as 140,000 cases of heart attacks while on the market.

The most risky uses of NSAIDs come from prolonged use, according to Harvard.

The science behind CBD is new and exciting, but novelty brings its own problems with research. The hemp plant has long been prohibited in the U.S. and scientists have rushed to learn more since federal hemp legalization in 2018.

In the summer of 2019, the World Health Organization published findings that CBD use carries no major health risks.

The National Institutes of Health have published multiple studies about the potential uses and benefits of CBD, including as a treatment for chronic and hard-to-treat pain as well as for inflammation. Both of these are common reasons people turn to NSAIDs.

Still, finding the right CBD products can be difficult, and a flooded market of new businesses and retailers has confused many as the news of hemp's utility has spread.

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EMILY UTNE

## THE POET AND THE PERSON

interested in being with anybody in an inauthentic way." And they strive for excellence: "To Danez, writing is not something you do when you're inspired. You do it because it's your discipline; you write every day... I don't know many people who have that kind of rigor and that kind of humanity."

When we spoke last week, a few days in advance of *Homie's* release, I said when I think of them, two adjectives come to mind: candid and fast. "You think fast and talk fast," I remark. "You move fast and process fast, and this is probably unfair, but you seem to work fast too."

"I would probably say I'm fast, but I wouldn't be talking about how I work," Smith replies, laughing.

"I feel like a very happy ghost that everybody has decided to see. And that is how I move through the world. I'm just grateful that people have decided to see me and my little ghost self. I feel like a 'regular-degular' '90s kind of girl. And I just write my little poems and try to call my mama."

"The poems," they add, with a measure of seriousness, "are part of how I pay attention to the world. I'm happy to be a part of it. I don't know how to describe myself. I like to teach. I like to write, and I like to dance. I'm normal, but I think I'm cute and funny.... That's how I feel."

**F**earlessness. Limitlessness. Brilliance. Transparency. Authenticity. Humanity.

I think about Smith's poem "The 17-Year-Old & the Gay Bar," a stunning work of art that's simultaneously sacrilegious and sanctified, offensive to those who view God in specific places, holy to those who know the divine is ubiquitous. It opens:

*this gin-heavy heaven, blessed  
ground to think gay & mean we.  
bless the fake id & the bouncer  
who knew  
this need to be needed, to belong,  
to know how  
a man taste full on vodka & free  
of sin. i know not which god to  
pray to.*

Smith is Smith wherever they go, on the page, on the stage, IRL, and online. Especially on Twitter and Instagram, where they promote sex positivity and body positivity in ways that seem simultaneously automatic and intentional. "In the early days of the internet, I had a lot of folks who were like, 'Hey, you might want to calm down a little bit of who you are or how you are,'" Smith says.



"I think from an early point, before I was considered Anybody's Known Poet, I was like, you know what? If my poems can cuss and be nasty, if my poems can get fucked, if my poems can have their asses out, if my poems can have sex and I can't, if my poems can be about sex work, but I can't actually say that out loud, then what's the point? Most of my [poetry] modes have been confessional or personal—even if it's not me, there is skin in the game for me in everything I do. So, to me, I can just be real online.

## "THE POEMS ARE PART OF HOW I PAY ATTENTION TO THE WORLD. I'M HAPPY TO BE A PART OF IT."

"I suck dick in poems," Smith continues. "And guess what, I suck dick in real life. Sometimes, I talk about that."

From "a note on the phone app tells me how far i am from other men's mouths":

*headless horsehung horsemen  
gallop to my gate  
dressed in pictures stolen off  
Google*

*men of every tribe mark their  
doors in blood  
No Fats, No Fems, No Blacks,  
Sorry, Just A Preference :)*

*I'm offered eight mouths, three  
asses, & four dicks before i'm given  
a name, i offer my body to pic-  
tures with eyes*

On Instagram, Smith is a master of selfies—everything from come-hither selifes to back-the-fuck-up selfies. Here they are at work, behind a microphone, or in more intimate settings, dressed for a night in or a night out, wearing a robe or a cheetah costume, topless or almost bottomless—drawers only.

Smith says this presence isn't contrived; it's important to them. "I've struggled with my body and with body image all my life, and it just became a way to check in on myself and actually feel good about myself. I don't think it's too intentional, but it is a public way to share the joy I've found in private. To look in the mirror and say I like what I see there and who I am there; I think it's powerful."

It's not that sex was something that was shamed in Smith's family or community. "People talked about it; people had it. But it was straight sex. It was not queer."

"I don't believe in that particular kind of respectability. People have sex; we can talk about it. People go to strip clubs; we can talk about it," Smith says. "Blame it

on Myspace—my morality went out the door a long time ago."

Asked how they first took an interest in poems, Smith replies: "A lot of us were sort of tricked into writing poetry."

Smith was enrolled in Jan Mandell's St. Paul Central High theater class, and says it naturally lent itself toward poetry just as performative poetry was gaining national attention. Mandell brought in celebrated Minnesota-based black actors, playwrights, and directors: "She had Marion McClinton come through and work

with us and folks like E.G. Bailey and Sha Cage. Who she had us working with—and the way theater manifested itself in that class—called for poetry."

Timing played a role as well. Smith became interested in poetry during the rise of the HBO show *DefPoetry Jam* and during the early days of slam poetry. "So all of a sudden," Smith says, "for us at least, poetry was exciting. There was poetry on TV... and it was all over Minneapolis too."

Mandell says when Smith first came to class, Smith had so much energy, they spent some of it "rolling around on the floor." But in the Black Box Theater, Central's acclaimed performing-arts incubator, Smith "found a safe space and began to direct all that energy." The class was designed to provide room for each student to create work based on their life story, and Smith's work shined. "When someone speaks their truth, everyone rises to their level," she says. "With Danez, it was never about ego or standing out, it was always about: Who can I bring along?"

Soon after Mandell's class, Rock the Mic, the erstwhile Minneapolis-based performance poetry organization, started sending a team to Brave New Voices and the International Poetry Slam. Smith was involved from the beginning and went on to have an illustrious slam poetry career. They were an Individual World Poetry Slam finalist. They were twice named Rustbelt Individual Champion, and they were on the 2014 Championship team Sad Boy Supper Club with three other poetry superstars: Cameron Awkward-Rich, Hieu Minh Nyugen, and sam sax.

It all started here in the Twin Cities. "Poetry was happening in a very bright and abundant community all around the Cities from when I was 14 and 15 on," Smith says.

Smith has maintained a strong connection to performative poetry, but during their time at the University of Wisconsin

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sin-Madison, they began devoting more attention to written work. This increased interest in poems on the page came about in part when Aumaud Jamaul Johnson, a Dorset and Pushcart Prize-winning professor and poet, asked, “Danez, are your poems only going to be good when you’re around to read them?”

“Poetry was, for me, a performative art,” Smith said. “So writing was a form of wanting to eventually get it to the stage. [Professor Johnson] was trying to make writers out of us. He wasn’t interested in perfecting us as performers or spoken-word artists. He didn’t shame that particular branch of poetry, but he was like, ‘Be about this work, about the page,’ and that shit shook me up.”

Smith began to think about writing with more curiosity, eventually studying Patricia Smith and Willie Perdomo and other poets who’d made a successful transition from the stage to the page.

“I think it was helpful to me to really think deeply about spoken word. But eventually, you just want to be a good poet and a good writer and a good maker of things—no matter what that is.”

## THE WRITTEN WORK

Smith began to garner widespread attention for their written work with the publication of 2015’s *[insert] boy*, which established them as an urgent poetic voice for their compelling consideration of violence against black bodies.

In “THE BLACK BOY AND THE BULLET,” Smith writes:

*one is hard & the other tries to be*

*one is fast & the other is faster*

*one is loud & one is a song  
with one note & endless rest*

*one’s whole life is a flash*

“I worked really hard on *[insert] boy*, and I realize that it’s complicated because my name started to be recognized more because of what I was writing about out of need and anger and protest,” Smith says of the outpouring of recognition. “The first time I felt in the national spotlight was for that work, but it was hard to feel like I had this rising star that was feeding off this elegiac mode or the death of these people.

“You’re happy to have your work recognized,” Smith continues, “but having work that was so personal also be the cause of attention like that means the applause comes with complications.”

After *[insert] boy* came 2017’s *Don’t Call Us Dead*, which was published by Minneapolis’ Graywolf Press to national and



EMILY UTNE

international praise. There was a glowing review by the New Yorker’s Dan Chiasson: “I hope this book brings fans of Smith’s astonishing performances, all readily available online, to the printed page.” The collection was shortlisted for the National Book Award, and Smith won the Forward Prize.

Speaking about the reaction to *Don’t Call Us Dead*, Smith says it was difficult.

“I mean, I’m a Minnesotan! It was exhilarating and frightening and all those things. I am very much a Leo. A Leo should never be given that kind of attention for a thing they did, because their egos can get out of control. It can be damaging for their egos too. You start to think—when is everybody going to realize that I’m a fraud, you know?”

To be clear: They’re not. I asked Douglas Kearney. Kearney, a Whiting Award-winning poet and performer, and an assistant professor of poetry and creative nonfiction at the University of Minnesota, says “[Smith’s] poems are rigorous. They reflect a keen composition. But there’s dirt in there, a kind that shines anyway.”

“So when we encounter the familiar in a Danez Smith poem,” Kearney says, “Danez doesn’t ‘elevate’ it because that would suggest it was somehow lower, lesser. What Danez does that strikes me is get at the capital-B beauty that Robin Coste Lewis talks about. It’s not pretty or

delicate; there’s energy and pain, blood there—and heat. I find tenderness in them, too. When Danez leaps into the speculative—[the poem] ‘summer, somewhere’ for example—maybe they are the most tender, and I think that might be because that’s a world they build and not one they inherit.”

From “summer somewhere”:

*there, my mother cried over me,  
open casket*

*but i wasn’t there. i was here,  
by my own  
water, singing a song i learned  
somewhere*

*south of somewhere worse.  
now everywhere i am is*

*the center of everything. i must  
be the lord of something.*

“I knew I had wrote a good book,” Smith says. “I knew that when the last I was made lowercase and the last T was crossed that I did my thing. I poured my guts into that book. I think that’s all you can ask of yourself as a writer—that you surrender to the piece in a particular kind of way—and I knew I did that. I was grateful for the response to it, that the book was resonant or challenging or whatever

it was for people, that it resonated with them in a particular way—I’m so grateful for that. The one hope I have for my work is that it’s useful. To feel the poems did a lot of work for folks or were of use, was more than I could ask for.”

## HOMIE

Asked where Smith’s work fits within the modern American canon, Kearney summarizes it as “deeply fluent in its present—especially in the ways Danez writes about how physical intimacy is managed through what often amounts to vast and impersonal networks of connection. Erotics and exchange. The tension between that kind of logistical, algorithmic understructure and the precarity of how Black people and their bodies get moved and managed through large systems. I think those two elements slow grind in a lot of Danez’s poetry.

“These are long-held concerns,” he continues, “but the distance between the figurative and the literal swings over time and I’d say Danez recognizes that shit acutely. The body as a site of pleasure and danger is not abstract for them.”

Smith’s work, Kearney concludes, is where “that urgency meets parts of the tradition.”

*Homie*, Smith’s third full-length poetry book, was released Tuesday. It has already garnered high praise in *Publisher’s Weekly*, the *Star Tribune*, from Parul Sehgal at the *New York Times*, and in a reverential Brontez Purnell essay published in the journal *Poetry*.

*Homie* includes “how many of us have them” a poem that takes its title from the rap classic “Friends” by Whodini. A poem I still remember knocking me out in my kitchen, where I stood at the end of a long work day, jacket still on, stack of bills in one hand and *Poetry* magazine in the other, staring slack-jawed at lines and ideas like

*...roast me. name me in the old ways,  
your shit-talk a river i wade, howling  
until it takes me.*

*i can’t stop laughing, more river  
wades*

*down my throat. could be drowning  
could be becoming the water,  
could be*

*a baptism from the inside out.*

*don’t save me, i don’t wanna be  
saved.*

Smith explains how *Homie* fits in conversation with their earlier work *[insert] boy* and *Don’t Call Us Dead* and their chapbook *black movie*.

“I think there’s this sort of thread of myself as a confessional elegist happening throughout those three books.



I think I am checking in with myself at three different points within my 20s—and all the poems that held me in. I'm returning to these thoughts and often to the same memories across these books, thinking about what violence looked like as a young boy running around St. Paul. Every book is thinking through mortality in some way and thinking through intimacy. It's thinking through what it's like to be black on this particular land, thinking through all these things and assessing and checking in. The books are speaking to each other, but sometimes there are different threads."

Of course, this presents the question: What's next artistically?

"I also feel myself very naturally and slowly turning toward other things, other styles of being," Smith says. "[The earlier poems] are closing off themselves, and I'm thinking, 'I did that.' Not to say they won't also echo each other, but when I look up and see what I've been doing in poems [lately], it feels like a very different thing than *Homie* and the other two books all together.

"But that's the work of the artist," they conclude. "You can't keep doing it the same way forever."

## HOME

Through their art, Smith belongs to America and to the world. Their work is powerful and portable; they could live anywhere. Plenty of poets pick New York, or the Northeast.

So, why Minnesota?

"Because it's the best place," Smith says. "And even when it's not the best place—because Minnesota often be trippin'—it's the place, often, that I feel the most urgent sense of love and how to do it right."

Here's Smith's "I'm Going Back to Minnesota Where Sadness Makes Sense," first published in the summer 2015 issue of the *Michigan Quarterly Review*:

*O California, don't you know the  
sun is only a god  
if you learn to starve for him? I'm  
bored with the ocean*

*I stood at the lip of it, dressed in  
down, praying for snow  
I know, I'm strange, too much  
light makes me nervous*

*at least in this land where the  
trees always bear green.  
I know something that doesn't  
die can't be beautiful.*

*Have you ever stood on a frozen  
lake, California?  
The sun above you, the snow &  
stalled sea—a field of mirror*

*all demanding to be the sun too,  
everything around you  
is light & it's gorgeous & if you  
stay too long it will kill you*

*& it's so sad, you know? You're  
the only warm thing for miles  
& the only thing that can't shine.*

Promoting the work and performing the work takes Smith away from home a lot. They estimate they traveled 150 days in 2019.


"And it's sad, too. One of the things I've been telling myself is I want to slow down a lot, because with the constant traveling, sometimes I feel like I live here, but I'm not rooted here. One of my actual goals is to be more like a Minnesotan, like somebody who actually lives in the Twin Cities. I want to feel more rooted here in a deeper way, because this is the place where I think about things like how good people treat each other. And I'm not talking about your average Minnesotan, like 'We're so nice.' I do think that, particularly among the black and immigrant population here, I have truly found great love, great friends, great people, great art. That's the Minnesota I hold deep and dear."

We run a few hypotheticals and explore alternatives, where they might go if they went anywhere and what might be different. "Every place is complicated, right? I mean, we live in America. There is no heaven for black people in America besides the place where we actively make it, and that's always in danger of destruction from white supremacy. Because [white supremacy] is everywhere. It's the institution America was founded on."

Here in Minnesota, at least, there's a uniquely high regard for the arts. "Minnesota is a great place to be an artist," Smith says. "There is a reverence. Minnesota is a place where you can say, 'I'm a dancer, I'm an artist, I'm a writer of some kind,' and you're met with a kind of reverence or respect. People here know that art is a thing that is necessary in order for people to live well."

"Besides," they add, "I've been an artist here my whole life. I used to go when Desdamona was hosting at the Blue Nile back in the day, sneaking in because I wasn't actually 18-plus.

"This is the place where I learned to write poems."

Danez Smith is the author of two chapbooks—hands on your knees (2013) and black movie (2016)—and three full-length poetry collections—[insert] Boy (2015), Don't Call Us Dead (2017), and *Homie*, published January 21 by Graywolf Press. They will be appearing at the Parkway Theater as part of "This Movie Changed Me" on Sunday, January 26, and at Moon Palace Books for "Danez and the Homies" on Monday, January 27. 



**WAR OF THE WHEELS!**

**FEB. 1**

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BY JD HOVLAND

Much like travel, word choices are tricky things. If you're not careful, both can be full of stereotypes and expectations. St. Paul's Estelle, in the Mac-Groveland neighborhood, has been labeled by itself and others as serving "Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish-inspired comfort foods." In this case, I think "inspired" is a key word.

I've been lucky enough to travel through the countries cited as inspiration. My memories of those experiences and their cuisine informed my excitement to dine at Estelle, to see where that inspiration led them.

Without a reservation, the bar straight ahead of the entrance is your best bet. The differences in ambience between the bar and dining room make Estelle feel bigger than it is—almost like more than one restaurant. The bar area is dark and cozy, lined in leafy wallpaper, inviting whispers. The dining room feels bright and open, with a wood wall that draws the eye's attention away from other diners' dishes as they whisk by. Despite an open kitchen, the ambience remained relatively quiet as I sipped on my Un Buen Camino, a creative mocktail with cola, vanilla, lime foam, and aquafaba that tastes like a dry cross between a Cuba Libre and a fizz.

A benefit to dining in Estelle's vinyl-fueled side bar is ordering from its extra pintxos menu. Pintxos are basically tapas, frequently small sandwiches or skewers, and very popular along the north coast of Spain, especially in the gastronomical mecca of San Sebastian. This pintxos menu is pleasantly affordable, which means a lot of flavors can be had for not a lot of money. I ordered a variety that were similar to things I'd enjoyed in my travels.

The Gilda is a skewer with white anchovy, green olive, and pickled pepper that goes great with a light, crisp beer. It's got lots of umami, salt, and pickle, with just a touch of sweetness from the pepper.

Estelle's bacon-wrapped dates—stuffed with chorizo, topped with a Calabrian marinara—are salty, fatty, spicy, and sweet. Stuffing them with chorizo instead of the more common nuts or tart cheese is a novel, good take on a classic. Roasting the dates gives them a soft, caramel-like consistency that plays well with the chew of the bacon.

Chicken liver mousse ("torejjas, fried brioche, pickled orange, and chive") is one of Estelle's menu descriptions that

# ST. PAUL AIMS FOR SPAIN

Reviewing Estelle through a traveler's lens



MADALYN ROWELL

gave me pause; *torejjas* is French toast, presumably made from brioche, while both the dates and The Gilda arrived with chives despite no warning from the menu. While I enjoyed all the flavors present, this bite-size dish's toothpick presentation proved clumsy, and I ended up using a fork.

I was intrigued by Estelle's orange fennel salad with pistachio, arugula, feta, and olive. The dish surpassed my expectations. Estelle builds the salad on a base of orange segments, with little olive wedges and micro-planed feta over the mound of arugula, and pistachios tumbling throughout. The salty and tangy taste of the feta is subdued thanks to this construction, and brings more of a savoriness throughout. The tang is handled by the orange's tartness, as the saltiness is from the olives' brine. If anything, I could

## ESTELLE

1806 St. Clair Ave., St. Paul

have done with more fennel flavor, but the salad was delightful.

The shrimp *al ajillo* found shrimp in a butter sauce with chili oil, chives, and baguette for absorbing some of that goodness. If you ordered this in Madrid, you'd be welcomed with a simpler dish of freshly shelled shrimp sizzling in a garlic-laden olive oil, crusty bread, and a toothpick—divine simplicity. At Estelle, the shrimp are served head-on and with little instruction. Trying to eat the shrimp heads proved a bit too chitinous—a few more seconds in the fryer would probably render the heads more enjoyable to crunch.

The salt cod croquettes are essentially mashed potatoes mixed with shredded fish, made into balls, and deep-fried. Most

pintxo bars in San Sebastian have a variety of these, including this cod version and a ham and cheese rendition. Their plating varies from the dining room to the bar, though the five croquettes arrive with some delicious house-made tartar sauce, and a lemon wedge. The creaminess of the potato and the filaments of salt cod encased in crispy little packages are really enjoyable, and remind me of fish sticks I enjoyed as a child, which then came paired with blue-box mac and cheese.

The fideuà again took me back to this "blue-box mac and cheese"—not by the flavor, which is quite good, peppered with shrimp, clams, and ham hock—but by that noodle texture. The more elevated pasta's cooking liquid is almost entirely absorbed, but what remains is enhanced by the small amount of starch released from the noodles, similar to the creaminess of a risotto. As the noodles jostle one another, they settle into neat parallels—like those spoonfuls of freshly made macaroni with just the right amount of butter and milk (always slightly more than what the recipe instructions call for). Make sure to ask for a bone dish for the empty clam shells; the service vessel doesn't allow for much room to push them out of the way.

Pasteis de nata were one of my favorite pastries during my travels. Though Estelle's version of the classic dessert is a little different than what you might find in the various shops in Lisbon, it still hints at the enjoyment you'd find biting into one in Portugal. Like their inspiration, our local homage's custard is eggy and sweet in a well laminated shell that's slightly thicker and less filled than their inspiration. Again, presentation varied from visit to visit: Once both cinnamon and powdered sugar were present, whereas recently the sprinkle of cinnamon seemed to be missing.

Every visit finishes with a couple small churros with chocolate sauce; they're tasty, but unlike a typical churro, they're less chewy and reminiscent of the exterior of a cream puff.

While I won't say Estelle's renditions of these familiar dishes transported me back to my travels, the cuisine's inspiration was evident and honored throughout. I hope they continue their research—whether it's dialing in the crispiness on the bottom of their fideuà, or those pasteis de nata ratios—as each greatly enjoyable dining experience kept me thinking about the region, and wanting to return soon. **CB**



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**JAN 30**



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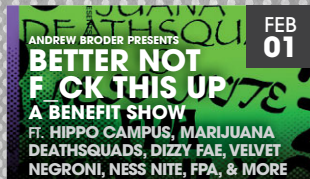
**FEB 08**

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**JAN 25**



**BETTER NOT  
F\*CK THIS UP**  
A BENEFIT SHOW  
FT. HIPPO CAMPUS, MARIJUANA  
DEATHSQUADS, DIZZY FAE, VELVET  
NEGRONI, NESS NITE, FPA, & MORE

**FEB 01**



**JJ GREY & MOFRO**  
WITH FREDDY & FRANCINE

**FEB 07**



**THE SUBURBS**  
WITH MILOE, DJ JAKE RUDH

**FEB 14**



**ED ACKERSON  
CELEBRATION  
OF LIFE BENEFIT**  
FT. THE JAYHAWKS, KRAIG  
JARRETT JOHNSON, BNIX,  
POLARA, & MORE

**FEB 15**



**LIL TJAY**

**FEB 20**



**90s  
ALL THAT  
90s PARTY**  
WITH DJ DAVE PAUL, DJ MARCO

**FEB 21**



**RAPHAEL SAADIQ**  
WITH JAMILA WOODS, DJ DUGGZ

**FEB 22**



**DASHBOARD  
CONFESSIONAL**  
WITH THE GET UP KIDS

**FEB 25**



**GO SHOW WITH  
IRATION**  
WITH IYA TERRA, BALLYHOO!,  
THE RIES BROTHERS

**FEB 28**

## PALACE THEATRE



**MANDOLIN  
ORANGE**  
WITH KATE RHUDY

**JAN 30**



**MICHAEL  
KIWANUKA**  
WITH SAMMY BRUE

**FEB 03**



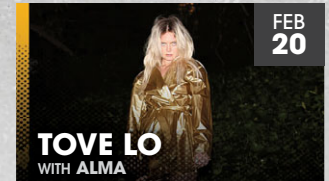
**KING PRINCESS**  
WITH KILO KISH

**FEB 04**



**CALEXICO AND  
IRON & WINE**  
WITH MADISON CUNNINGHAM

**FEB 14**



**TOVE LO**  
WITH ALMA

**FEB 20**

## FITZGERALD THEATER




**LADYSMITH BLACK  
MAMBAZO**

**MAR 01**



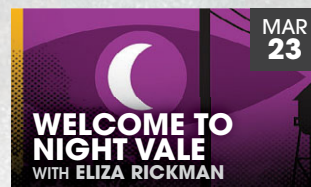
**KAMASI  
WASHINGTON**

**MAR 04**



**NATIONAL  
GEOGRAPHIC LIVE  
LIFE ON THE VERTICAL**  
WITH MARK SYNNOTT

**MAR 08**



**WELCOME TO  
NIGHT VALE**  
WITH ELIZA RICKMAN

**MAR 23**



**GARY GULMAN**

**MAR 27**

## FINE LINE



**RON POPE**  
W/ CAROLINE SPENCE

**JAN 22**



**GZA  
25TH ANNIVERSARY OF  
LIQUID SWORDS**  
W/ JUICE LORD, KALEEM THE DREAM

**JAN 26**



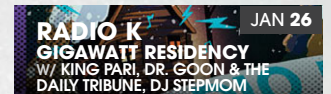
**THE 69 EYES**  
W/ WEDNESDAY 13, SUMO CYCO,  
THE CROWNED

**JAN 30**



**GREAT GOOD FINE OK**  
W/ AARON TAOS

**JAN 22**



**RADIO K  
GIGAWATT RESIDENCY**  
W/ KING PARI, DR. GOON & THE  
DAILY TRIBUNE, DJ STEPMOM

**JAN 26**



**EMO NITE**

**JAN 31**



**TURKUAZ**  
W/ NEAL FRANCIS

**FEB 01**



**LATINXPOLIS  
CELEBRATION OF  
LATINX MOVEMENT**  
W/ MARIA ISA, CRISTIAN BACA, queenDUIN

**FEB 07**



**THE GET  
TOGETHER, LASKA,  
AND SAL PARADISE**

**JAN 23**



**BAILEN**  
W/ SUPERIOR SIREN

**JAN 27**

## TURF CLUB



**FRUITION**  
W/ THE MIGHTY PINES

**JAN 23**




**ZEPPPO**  
W/ TABAH

**JAN 24**



**BEN NOBLE,  
CHURCH TRAFFIC,  
AND GOOD DICTION**

**JAN 25**



**SEAN ANONYMOUS  
BIRTHDAY SHOW**  
W/ METASOTA, STUDENT1, DJ MIXIE

**JAN 24**




**THE  
IMMACULATE BEINGS**  
W/ LUCID VANGUARD,  
HURRAH! A BOLT OF LIGHT!

**JAN 29**




**GENERAL B AND THE WIZ,  
WE ARE THE WILLOWS,  
FAREWELL MILWAUKEE**

**JAN 31**



**IRONSTAR, DRUZU  
ROSE, AND TOPEZ**

**FEB 01**



**ERIK KOSKINEN**  
W/ LUKE LEBLANC

**FEB 03**



**STOLYETTE  
RECORD RELEASE SHOW**  
W/ RINGING BELL, THE NUNNERY,  
DJ MILD DAVIDSON

**JAN 25**



**DIGITAL  
FRUIT VOL. 1**  
FT. QTZ, MIC DOS, DEO, BAFO JOSEPH,  
ZACH SPIROV, DJ ROWSHEEN


**JAN 30**

## AROUND TOWN



**MIPSO**  
W/ BRIDGET KEARNEY &  
BENJAMIN LAZAR DAVIS  
THE CEDAR CULTURAL CENTER

**JAN 26**



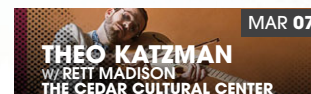
**MAGIC CITY HIPPIES**  
W/ TIM ATLAS  
AMSTERDAM BAR & HALL

**FEB 01**



**THE DOLLOP**  
W/ DAVE ANTHONY, GARETH REYNOLDS  
PANTAGES THEATRE

**MAR 07**



**THEO KATZMAN**  
W/ RETT MADISON  
THE CEDAR CULTURAL CENTER

**MAR 07**



**WILCO**  
DECC SYMPHONY HALL (DULUTH)

**MAR 10**



# A LIST

**FRIDAY** McKnight print artists at Highpoint p. 17 **SATURDAY** Mark Morris visits the Swinging '60s p. 17 **SUNDAY** A cidery becomes an indoor pup-park p. 17

A different kind of ice house: Explore this cool castle in New Brighton.



ANTHONY SOUFFLE/STAR TRIBUNE

## WEDNESDAY 1.22

### WINTER ICE CASTLES

LONG LAKE REGIONAL PARK

The Ice Castles are back in Minnesota for a sixth installment, this time setting up shop in New Brighton. What started with a guy in Utah trying to build an ice cave for his daughter has become a massive tourist sensation, with locations popping up all over the country. Castles feature tunnels, fountains, slides, and crawl spaces, making it feel like the movie *Frozen* has come to life. Construction begins in November, as professional ice artisans have been growing, harvesting, and placing up to 10,000 icicles each day to create the structure, which will be lit up by LED lights once it has reached peak winter wonderland. The Ice Castles were unveiled on January

17 and will likely remain open through March—but that's only if the weather cooperates and stays cold enough to keep the castles frozen. So, realistically, we're saying they'll probably be open until at least Memorial Day. Find updates and more info at [icecastles.com/minnesota](http://icecastles.com/minnesota). 4 to 9 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays; 4 to 10:30 p.m. Fridays; noon to 10:30 p.m. Saturdays; noon to 8 p.m. Sundays. \$10-\$22; reservations are required. 1500 Old Hwy. 8, New Brighton.

**Through March —PATRICK STRAIT**

## THURSDAY 1.23

### FESTIVAL

### SAINT PAUL WINTER CARNIVAL

VARIOUS LOCATIONS

For 134 years, Minnesota has been celebrating winter and showing the world that the weather here isn't so

scary. The party returns this January for 11 days of chilly fun. That includes parades, like the nighttime Moon Glow Parade and the daytime march for King Borealis. Rice Park is home to the beautiful ice sculptures and the ice bar, where you can order up beer, wine, and warm mulled drinks. The area will host a slew of happenings, including family festivals, a local makers' mart, a disco night, and a dog-friendly happy hour with Hops & Hounds. The Vulcan Snow Park at the Minnesota Fairgrounds is also stacked with things to see and do, such as snow sculpting contests, the giant snow slide and maze, sporting events and competitions, and snowboarding demos. For a complete schedule of events, see the official website, [www.wintercarnival.com](http://www.wintercarnival.com), or call the main hotline at 651-223-7400 for details. **Through February 2 —JESSICA ARMBRUSTER**

### SPORTS

### U.S. POND HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP

LAKE NOKOMIS

Every year, in the dead of winter, hockey teams come together to compete in one of the most epic amateur sporting tournaments in the nation. Players come from all walks of life and backgrounds; some are retired professional athletes, others have simply been playing for years at their local pond. Some are from the Twin Cities, and some are from Canada and beyond. Divisions include youth, men, women, and rink rat, for those who are 40 and up, with the winner taking home the Golden Shovel. For those not competing, a warming tent will offer beer and eats from Green Mill, and there will be a special section

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 17 ►**





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## A-LIST

CONTINUED FROM THURSDAY ►

for an all-ages open skate. For complete game schedules, see the official U.S. Pond Hockey website, [uspondhockey.com](http://uspondhockey.com). 5 to 9 p.m. Thursday; 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday; 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Free. 5001 Lake Nokomis Pkwy. W., Minneapolis. **Through Sunday** —JESSICA ARMBRUSTER

### ART/MUSEUM

## A CHOICE OF WEAPONS, HONOR, AND DIGNITY

MINNESOTA MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

The camera, particularly in the hands of Gordon Parks and Jamel Shabazz, is a powerful weapon through which black dignity, humor, and humanity are unflinchingly documented. Parks famously captured life from the Jim Crow era through the Civil Rights movement, creating now-iconic images of emotional and socio-political resonance. Inspired by Parks' work, Shabazz has been chronicling youth culture, the hip-hop scene, and black visual culture. Together, these champions of black life have documented an evolution of empowerment. Robin Hickman-Winfield, CEO and executive producer of SoulTouch Productions and a great-niece of Parks', curated the exhibition. An opening reception will be held this Thursday, January 23, from 6 to 8 p.m. Check online to RSVP ([mmaa.org](http://mmaa.org)). 350 Robert St. N., St. Paul; 651-797-2571.

**Through April 19** —CAMILLE LEFEVRE

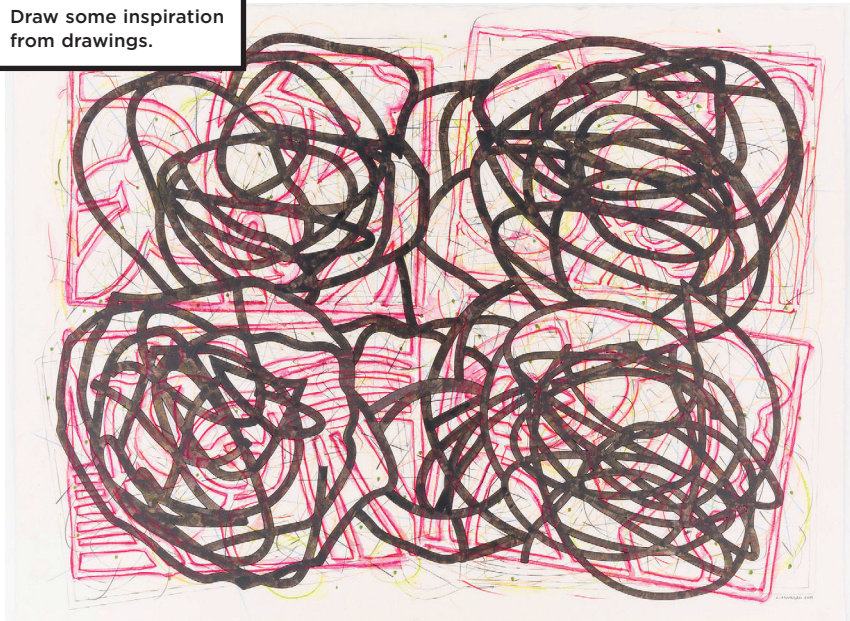
### THEATER

## GREY ROCK

GUTHRIE THEATER

Palestinian playwright and director Amir Nizar Zuabi's *Grey Rock* follows Yusuf, a former television repairman living in the West Bank who intends to forge his own path to the stars by building a rocket in his shed. Despite a complete lack of financial resources, government support, or scientific proficiency, Yusuf commits to his goal with unwavering conviction. Internationally acclaimed actor Khalifa Natour makes a convincing case as Yusuf, heading up the production's five-person Palestinian cast. Delivered with English dialogue, *Grey Rock* is the inaugural work commissioned and presented by the Remote Theater Project, an organization devoted to developing new works by international artists for international audiences. 7:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday; 1 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. \$9-\$32. 818 S. Second St., Minneapolis; 612-377-2224. **Through Sunday** —BRAD RICHASON

Draw some inspiration from drawings.



CLARENCE MORGAN, *AUTONOMY OF LANGUAGE*

FRIDAY 1.24

### ART/GALLERY

## 2019 MCKNIGHT PRINTMAKING FELLOWSHIP EXHIBITION

HIGHPOINT CENTER FOR PRINTMAKING

This week, Highpoint is hosting a reception for the McKnight Foundation's first printmaking fellows, Jenny Schmid and Justin Quinn. The program was established in 2019, and the first recipients were chosen by a jury of prestigious curators, including Portland Art Museum's Mary Weaver Chapin and Denver Art Museum's John Lukavic. The two artists received \$25,000, and were able to use Highpoint's printmaking studio, get technical support, and host studio visits. Schmid, a professor at the University of Minnesota, has been continuing her work of combining mythical characters with contemporary situations using intaglio, lithography, and public art performance. Meanwhile, Quinn takes a tactile, almost sculptural approach to his intricate works on paper. See their new pieces and take in a conversation between Schmid and Quinn led by Faye Hirsch, senior editor at *Art in America*, on Friday, January 24, from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Free. 912 W. Lake St., Minneapolis; 612-871-1326. **Through February 22** —SHEILA REGAN

SATURDAY 1.25

### DANCE

## MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP: PEPPERLAND

NORTHROP

Nothing like a blast from the past to fight the end-of-January doldrums. Created

to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *Pepperland* abounds with choreographer Mark Morris' native wit and theatrical savvy. Dancers in dark glasses and vivid Carnaby Street colors echo psychedelic trips, riffs on Indian music, Asian spirituality, and all the pop-culture folderol of the Swinging Sixties. Morris' movement borrows from modern and classical Indian dance, ballet, global, and folk dance forms. They make inspired pairings with the infinitely eclectic music of the Fab Four. Well, it's not exactly their music, rather a reimagining of it by Ethan Iverson, whose bold new arrangements of selections from the album are performed live by a jazz ensemble of trombone, vocals, sax, percussion, and, yes, even a theremin. Expect both a deconstruction and a celebration of Beatlemania. 7:30 p.m. \$22-\$47. 84 Church St. SE, Minneapolis; 612-624-2345. —LINDA SHAPIRO

### ART/GALLERY

## THE BEGINNING OF EVERYTHING

KATHERINE E. NASH GALLERY

Yes, they're all artists. But what else do Henri Matisse, Jean Dubuffet, and Käthe Kollwitz have in common? What about such local luminaries as Leslie Barlow, Harriet Bart, Frank Big Bear, Jonathon Thunder, Jim Denomie, and John Schuerman? Drawing. Whether as a way of exploring a project's inception or as an aesthetic end in itself, drawing is one of the most primal of artistic expressions. In this exhibition, featuring work by nearly 100 artists, the variety of ways in which artists' past and present deploy the act of drawing receives attention—with results as astounding as they are

diverse in technique and subject matter. A public reception will be held from 6 to 10 p.m. Saturday, January 25. Free. 405 21st Ave. S., Minneapolis; 612-625-8096.

**Through March 28** —CAMILLE LEFEVRE

### OPERA

## FLIGHT

ORDWAY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

In 1988, Iranian refugee Mehran Karimi Nasseri began an 18-year layover at Charles de Gaulle Airport outside Paris. After losing his papers, he fell into a bureaucratic limbo of Homeric proportions, and began his odyssey of living the better part of two decades at the airport, stranded between worlds. The story would later be (very) loosely adapted in Stephen Spielberg's movie *The Terminal*. Before that film adaptation, prolific composer Jonathan Dove found inspiration in Nasseri's story for the opera *Flight*, in which the stranded refugee connects a group of strangers awaiting their own departures. The intervening years since Nasseri's ordeal and *Flight's* premiere have only rendered the opera's themes of humanity transcending dehumanizing borders all the more poignant. Cortez Mitchell sings the lead role in this production, which is conducted by Geoffrey McDonald and directed by David Radames Toro. 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Tuesday, and Thursday, January 30; 8 p.m. Saturday, February 1; 2 p.m. Sunday, February 2. \$25-\$215. 345 Washington St., St. Paul; 651-224-4222.

**Through February 2** —BRYAN MILLER

SUNDAY 1.26

### BEER/DOGS

## POP-UP INDOOR DOG PARK

MINNEAPOLIS CIDER COMPANY

During the warmer months in Minnesota, dog parks become hot spots for pups and their humans. It's a place to meet new buddies, sniff butts, and burn off some excess energy. In the wintertime, however, dogs can get cabin fever as much as their human friends. Walks become shorter, taking a dump outside in the cold is less fun, and the parks are less frequented. But this Sunday at Minneapolis Cider Company, the dog park moves inside for a day of fun regardless of the weather. Well-behaved beasts will be invited to run, jump, and explore a 4,000-square-foot pop-up park (we're guessing that the space's pickleball court is being repurposed for the afternoon). Meanwhile, good boys and girls can have their own kind of fun while enjoying drinks from the bar. 1 to 5 p.m. Free. 701 SE Ninth St., Minneapolis; 612-886-1357. —JESSICA ARMBRUSTER





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FILM

# ZERO TO HERO

Amazon's *Troop Zero* asks: What if *Moonrise Kingdom*, but for kids?



CURTIS BONDS BAKER/AMAZON

BY TONY LIBERA

In last week's *Underwater* review, I talked about the classic T.S. Eliot line "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal." There's nothing new under the sun, so I don't want to harp on cypocating week in and week out. That said, it's worth revisiting with *Troop Zero*.

*Underwater* fizzled because it didn't do anything worthwhile with its mimicry. It repackaged *Alien* for people who can instead just watch *Alien*. *Troop Zero*, on the other hand, recalls *Little Miss Sunshine* and *Moonrise Kingdom*. But it's not a complete throwaway because it positions itself for a different audience: kids.

The film, which premiered at Sundance last year, opens in Georgia, 1977. Young Christmas Flint (Mckenna Grace), a space-obsessed outcast who recently lost her mother, overhears the local Birdie Scouts discussing their upcoming jamboree. It seems the top-performing troop will get to speak on NASA's Golden Record, which will go into space as part of the *Voyager* program.

Christmas, of course, wants to join the Birdies and get on the record—but her alleged pants-peeing and bullying by the Birdies force her to start her own troop. Can this motley crew pull itself together

in time to win the day? It's not too difficult to call this one.

Summarized like that, *Troop Zero* doesn't sound too derivative. And yet, the movie goes from novel to "I see where this is going" pretty quickly. As a result, there's a major pacing problem up until the jamboree, which culminates in an expected stage number. Christmas leads *Troop Zero*'s atypical act, the audience and organizers are put off, and the other lovable misfits perform a bold act of solidarity. Though they may not win the grand prize, they're better for coming together and giving it a shot.

The beats are broadly imitative, but the overall look and feel really drive it home. Sure, yellow titles, yellow grading, and yellow costume design aren't the most direct signifiers of all time. But all are used—with relative fame—in both *Little Miss Sunshine* and *Moonrise Kingdom*. A movie can't own a color, but when it's combined with other twee sensibilities, familiar oddball story arcs, and a Bowie-heavy soundtrack, it's hard not to look at what it's knocking off.

*Troop Zero*'s saving grace is that most of the young 'uns it's geared toward have never seen either of those movies. It's a boring watch for us adults, but because it does feel so much like *Little Miss Sunshine Jr.*, it hits its stride tackling similar themes.

## TROOP ZERO

directed by Bert & Bertie  
out now on Amazon Prime

As such, *Troop Zero* offers nice lessons about resilience in the face of certain defeat and being yourself no matter what.

If there's one last gripe for the grownups, it's the issue of *Troop Zero*'s setting. The *Voyager* plot point necessitates that the movie take place in the late '70s, but *Troop Zero* handles concepts of race, class, and homosexuality with a cursory and pretty rosy outlook, even for today. It's mostly a children's movie, so I'm not looking for a nuanced critique of income inequality. But it's a little dishonest to act like a gay kid in rural 1977 Georgia will be heralded by the townsfolk as a superstar hairdresser. It'd be a better world, but it's not our world. And without deeper dives, *Troop Zero* feels a bit hollow in places.

Despite its flaws, *Troop Zero* offers a serviceable story for little kids. *Little Miss Sunshine*'s f-bombs, suicide subplot, and heroin use are probably more than most of them can handle, so this'll do until they get older. If *Underwater* is red on the imitation scale, *Troop Zero* is a nice Wes Anderson yellow. Maybe next week we'll have a green movie, and I'll never have to talk about T.S. Eliot again.



# NORA'S HOME

Ibsen inspires two very different works

**NOURA**  
Guthrie Theater  
Through February 16



DAN NORMAN

BY JAY GABLER

In a program note for the Jungle Theater production of *A Doll's House, Part 2*, director Joanie Schultz refers to the “door slam heard around the world.” That’s the sound of Nora walking out of her home at the end of Henrik Ibsen’s 1879 play *A Doll's House*.

The portrayal of a woman choosing to leave her husband and children made the play instantly notorious, but *A Doll's House* wouldn’t have remained a staple of the repertoire if a liberating twist were all it had going for it. Lucas Hnath’s play at the Jungle and Heather Raffo’s *Noura* at the Guthrie both take Ibsen’s original as a point of departure for probing explorations of marriage.

As its title suggests, *A Doll's House, Part 2* is a straight-up sequel, though Hnath’s fresh take doesn’t pretend to look or feel like any follow-up Ibsen could have written.

It’s 15 years after the events of *A Doll's House*, and Nora (Christina Baldwin) darkens that infamous door for the first time since she walked out. Her reasons for coming back involve complex legal issues that feel a little contrived—but then, so were the paperwork shenanigans that drove Ibsen’s original plot. Nora’s return forces a reckoning with her husband (Steven Epp), their daughter (Megan Burns), and her nanny (Angela Timberman).

This 2017 script has quickly become one of the most-produced plays in the country, and in Schultz’s compelling production it’s easy to see why. The premise provides a natural hook, and Hnath’s crucial insight is that Ibsen’s play ended just when the

## A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2

Jungle Theater  
Through February 23

conversation was starting to get interesting. It’s frankly thrilling to watch some of Minnesota’s finest actors continue that conversation; the superb ensemble crackles with high-wire energy.

*Noura* borrows themes and plot elements from Ibsen but does something very different with them. In fact, try not to think about *A Doll's House* while you’re watching *Noura*: Tracking the similarities and differences can distract from Raffo’s new characters and the urgent challenges they’re facing.

Set in New York circa 2016, *Noura* finds a family of Iraqi immigrants celebrating Christmas. The title character (Gamze Ceylan) is eager to welcome a young Iraqi woman (Layan Elwazani) whose move to America she’s supporting, and Noura’s husband, Tareq (Fajer Kaisi), is looking forward to a quiet holiday with their son (a rotating role) and a longtime family friend (Kal Naga).

As in Ibsen, some long-suppressed truths are told. Here, though, those truths involve not just a troubled marriage but two troubled nations. All the adult characters are haunted by memories of Iraq, full of questions with no easy answers as they face the future. While the play’s rhythms are familiar, the substance of their lives is suffused with painful ambiguity. Under the direction of Taibi Magar, Ceylan draws a powerful portrait.

Both shows demonstrate how urgently relevant Ibsen’s ideas remain. One door closed, and many more have been opened. **CP**

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by **JIEHAE PARK**  
directed by **LILY TUNG CRYSTAL**



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Halsey



OWEN SWEENEY

## WHO CAN RELATE?

On their new albums, Selena Gomez and Halsey reduce fame to a human scale

BY KEITH HARRIS

Smart people tend to hate the word “relatable,” and who came blame them? It’s a clunky term for a suspect concept, summoning images of adults who have no time for any novel or film that doesn’t flatter and reflect their own experience.

But pop music can’t dodge the relatability question. Listening to pop has always been, in part, an exercise in developing empathy through projection, with every “I” and “me” spacious enough to provide anyone who feels like they’ve been overlooked the sense of being seen. In the process, you learn that your most secret, special, individual romantic crises are so commonplace that the language in which people sing about them became clichéd before you were born.

Celebrity complicates that relationship, though. Can a Taylor Swift song truly be about you anymore, or are listeners just vicariously dabbling in someone else’s larger-than-life adventures, enjoying a kind of Marvel blockbuster of the heart? Still, at a moment when too much of our cultural energy is spent projecting rich inner lives upon attractive famous people, two new pop albums have found ways to be emotionally useful to us commoners.

Both Selena Gomez and Halsey generated buzz for their latest albums with gargan-

antuan ballads about celebrity exes: Gomez’s purportedly Bieber-bye-bye-bidding “Lose You to Love Me” and Halsey’s kiss-off to alleged rapper G-Eazy, “Without Me.” As half of one of the microscopically analyzed pop couples of the previous decade, Gomez can’t keep each lyric from feeling like a roman à clef, but *Rare* at least diffuses that impulse. Halsey, still not quite a household name, has thrust herself into autobiography on *Manic*, but in a way that encourages listeners to indulge their own idiosyncrasies.

One way that *Rare* lives up to its title is that in a time of major pop statements, it is, unfashionably, just a collection of songs, its pleasures mild but durable. *Rare* is an intimate album that fantasizes about acting out publicly. The lyrics sound less like private talks than practice conversations, the dialogues you imagine with future lovers and exes that never quite materialize as expected.

Gomez is no world-class belter: When her songs crest, her voice pixilates into electronic crystals, like an elaborate firework preceded by only a silent explosion. Even on her big hit ballad, she’s artfully upstaged by backup voice trickery. Instead, Gomez finds her voice through adapting to the environment of each successive track. She’s self-absorbed in a positive sense, in thrum with the elec-

tronic sensuality of giving herself over to the groove that’s borderline autoerotic. She’s not assertive; even confident seems a little overstating it. She sounds comfortable, and the album’s lack of features creates such a focus on her that when 6lack sidles into a verse on “Crowded Room” (and not inappropriately), it’s startling.

And yet, there are times you could even forget you’re listening to a Selena Gomez record, which might disappoint some. But where Pitchfork’s Quinn Moreland complains that some of these tracks “feel like they could be sung by anyone,” I’m relieved. Transforming yourself from celebrity to anywoman is a hell of a feat, and a lot more useful to non-celebrities falling in and out of love.

Halsey’s at an awkward stage of fame: not quite tabloid fodder yet able to fill hockey arenas. So while Gomez plays peekaboo with the spotlight, the Jersey girl born Ashley Frangipane puts her madcap trauma at center stage on *Manic*. The first track’s even called “Ashley”; the closing track, “929,” is an autobiographical look back at her career, including bits of learned wisdom like “Nobody loves you/They just try to fuck you/Then put you on a feature on the b-side,” and which is named for the time she was supposedly born—though she later reveals that she lied by three minutes, as though just to prove what a weirdo she is.

*Manic* is an album spiked with pop-culture references. A snippet of Kate Winslet’s dialogue from *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* introduces “Clementine” (named for Winslet’s character in the film); a clip from *Jennifer’s Body* where Megan Fox explains why it’s OK to kill boys prefaces a song called (what else) “Killing Boys.” John Mayer appears both literally, via an ecstatic voicemail congratulating Halsey on her No. 1 hit, and figuratively, when Halsey queers and sexes up his softcore pillow talk with “Your pussy is a wonderland/And I could be a better man”—after which Alanis Morissette chimes in with “Cause he and she is her/And her and he are loved/And I have never felt the difference.”

The Alanis cameo makes sense, because Halsey shares her idol’s gift for an awkward pretension that’s somehow even more endearing when it fails, while also working a variation on Alanis’ vocal swoop. Acerbic and breathy, so consistently electronically modulated that the effects now feel inseparable from her identity, Halsey’s voice also artfully garbles lyrics so that when I first heard “I don’t want to Uma Thurman your ass any more” I first heard something about

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## MUSIC

"her thumb in your ass," since that wouldn't be out of character either.

*Manic* moves into the '90s alt-pop reconfigured space opened up by Billie Eilish's *When We Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* last year. Eilish's brother/producer, Finneas, even has a credit here. And the toy-piano chamber-trap production on "Clementine," courtesy of XXXTentacion collaborator John Cunningham, has a Fiona Apple singsong to it, adorned by manically shouted backup vocals of "I don't need anyone!" Producers Lido and Greg Kurstin, who helmed her two previous albums, appear only sporadically.

Sometimes Halsey falls back on therapy-pop lines like "I'm still learning to love myself" that I'm sure neither Alanis nor her therapist would consider sufficiently thought through. But usually she gets weirder ("Wish I could see what it's like to be the blood in my veins") or funnier ("In my world, I'm constantly, constantly havin' a breakthrough/Or a breakdown, or a blackout/Would you make out with me?")

There's something cannily self-protective about Selena Gomez, and there's something deliriously extra about Halsey, and both seem like recognizable human responses to the messiness of love and sex and gossip and impulse control everyone staggers through in their twenties. With *Rare* and with *Manic*, each makes a case that pop may still retain some relevance for your humdrum life and mine. **C+**

## CRITICS' PICKS

## HALF MOON RUN

AMSTERDAM BAR & HALL, THURSDAY 1.23  
Half Moon Run's folksy chamber pop hops between acoustic strum, electronic sparkle, and orchestral pomp with the instinctive fluidity of hardcore music nerds. The Montreal band's most recent album, last year's *A Blemish in the Great Light*, burbles with goofy surprises, maybe none as entertaining as the fact that they actually named a song "Jello On My Mind." With Taylor Janzen. 18+. 7 p.m. \$17/\$19. 6 W. Sixth St., St. Paul; 612-285-3112. —LUCAS FAGEN

## AMBER LIU

VARSITY THEATER, TUESDAY 1.28  
A decade ago, Amber Liu moved from Los Angeles to Seoul to join the (excellent) girl group f(x); now she's back, singing in English, to pursue solo stardom in the States. Her new X EP cultivates a summery, kinetic pop-R&B vibe, peaking with "Other People," the bounciest and most exuberant of wounded breakup songs. With Meg & Dia and Justice Carradine. 6:30 p.m. \$28-\$45+. 1308 Fourth St. SE, Minneapolis; 612-604-0222. —LUCAS FAGEN



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# The Long Game

What's so bad about gaslighting my girlfriend?



Dan Savage

**I** did one of the things you always say is bad, immature, and hurtful. I was a jerk to my girlfriend for weeks because I wanted her to break up with me. I know it was cowardly. I think she's a great woman, but I just wasn't into the relationship and I let it go longer than I should have. I felt terrible that she loved me and I didn't love her back, and I didn't want to hurt her. My question is this: Why do you think sabotaging a relationship in this way is so bad? I'm glad she hates me now. She can feel anger instead of sadness. I didn't want to be a "great guy" who did the right thing when the relationship needed to end. I want her to think I'm awful so she can move on with her life. If I said all the right things, that makes me more attractive and a loss. I've had women do that to me—break up with me the "right" way—and I respected them more and felt more in love with them and missed them more. I still think about them because they were so kind and respectful when they dumped me. I prefer the relationships I've had that ended with hatred, because at least I knew we weren't good for each other and the end was no skin off my back. Isn't it better this way? (I've got no sign-off that creates a clever acronym. Make one up if you want to publish my letter.)

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**I did what I could** with your sign-off.

Being a jerk to someone you're not interested in seeing anymore in the hopes that they'll dump you is never okay. It's certainly not a favor you're doing them, ASSHOLE, if for no other reason than they're unlikely to call it quits at the first sign of your assholery. When someone's actions (jerkishness, assholery) conflict with their words ("I love you, too, sweetheart"), the person on the receiving end of crazy-making mixed messages rarely bolts immediately. They seek reassurance. They ask the person who's being an asshole to them if they're still good, if everything's okay, if they're still in love.

And those aren't questions the person being an asshole can answer honestly, ASSHOLE, because honest answers would end the relationship. And that's not how the asshole wants it, right? The asshole doesn't want to honestly end things them-

selves; the asshole wants to dishonestly (and dishonorably) force the other person to end the relationship. So the asshole says we're good, everything's okay, I still love you, etc., and then dials the assholery up a little more.

Does the other person bolt then? Nope. The other person asks all those same questions again, the asshole offers up the same lying assurances, and the other person asks again and is fed more lies. This sometimes goes on for years before the person being emotionally abused by a lying asshole decides they can't take it anymore and ends the relationship—often over the objections of the person who wanted out all along!

Gaslighting isn't a term I throw around often or loosely, ASSHOLE, but what you describe doing—and what you're attempting to rationalize as a gift of some sort—may be the most common form of gaslighting. Nothing about being gaslighted in this manner makes it easier to bounce back after a relationship ends. It makes it harder. Yeah, yeah, your ex "gets" to be mad at you, but she's going to have a much harder time trusting anyone after dating you because your assholery will likely cause her to doubt her own judgment. ("This new guy says he loves me, but the last guy—that fucking asshole—said he loved me, over and over again, and it was a lie. What if this guy is lying to me, too?")

These brand-new insecurities, a parting gift from you, may cause her to end or sabotage relationships that could have been great. As for your worry that a person may wind up carrying a torch for an ex who ends things with kindness and respect, well, torches have a way of burning out over time, and it's even possible to will yourself to set a torch down and walk away from it. But the kind of emotional damage done by actions like yours, ASSHOLE? That shit can last a lifetime.

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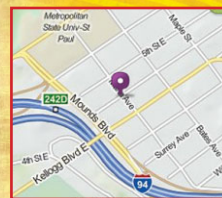


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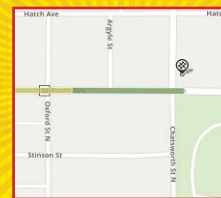
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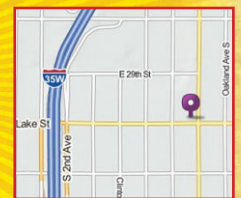
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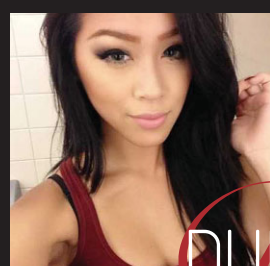
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